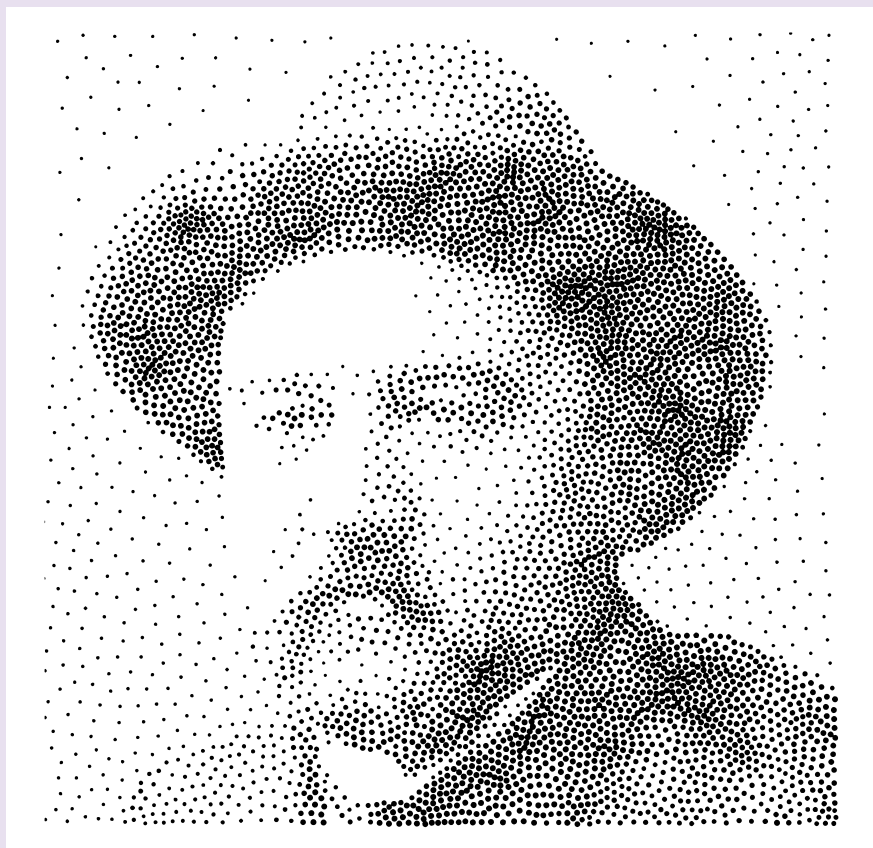


Russian Short Stories

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# The Garden Of The Holy Virgin



Alexander Kuprin

# The Garden Of The Holy Virgin by Aleksandr I. Kuprin

*Aleksandr I. Kuprin*

6-7 minutes Translated from Russian by Leo Pasvolsky 980 words

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Far beyond the bounds of the Milky Way, upon a planet which will never be disclosed to the eye of the most diligent astronomer, blooms the wonderful, mysterious garden of the Holy Virgin Mary. All the flowers that exist upon our poor and sinful earth, bloom there for many long years, never fading, ever cared for by the patient hands of invisible gardeners. And each flower contains a particle of the soul of a man living on the earth, that particle which sleeps not during our nightly slumber, that leads us through marvellous lands, that shows us the centuries gone by, that conjures up before us the faces of our departed friends, that spins in our imagination the variegated tissues of our slumber-being, now sweet, now ludicrous, now terrible, now blissful, that makes us awaken in unreasonable joy, or in bitter tears, that often opens before us the impenetrable curtains, beyond which stretch out the dark paths of the future, discernible only to children, wise men, and blessed clairvoyants. These flowers are the souls of human dreams.

Every time that the moon is full, in those hours of the night that immediately precede the dawn, when our nightly visions are especially bright, lively, and restless, when the pale

lunatics, with their eyes closed and their faces turned toward the sky, return to their cold beds along the dangerous edges of the housetops, when the night-flowers open their chalices— then the Holy Virgin walks through her garden with light and quiet steps. To her right, glides the round moon, while behind it, never tarrying, always keeping the same distance, flows a little star, like a small boat tied with invisible threads to the stern of a large ship. Soon both the ship and the boat disappear, buried in the vapor-like, orange-colored clouds, and, suddenly, they appear in the dark-blue space. Then their light lends a silvery hue to the Holy Virgin's blue chiton and to her beautiful face, whose charm and blessedness no man can describe with word, brush, or music.

And, fluttering in joyous impatience, the flowers sway on their thin stems and, like children, stretch out to touch the blue chiton with their petals. And Holy Mary gently smiles upon their pure joy, for she is the mother of Jesus, who loved flowers so dearly during his life on earth. With her thin, white, kind fingers she gently caresses the souls of children, the modest daisies, gold-cups, snowdrops, veronicas, and the fairy spheres of dandelions. Boundless is her bounty, for it extends over them all: the daffodils, those beautiful love-flowers, the proud and passionate roses, the conceited peonies, the orchids, so terrible in their strange beauty, the bitter, fiery poppies, the tuberose and hyacinths, that spread their heavy odors around the deathbed. She sends bright maidenly dreams to lilies-of-the-valley, violets, and mignonettes. And to the plain wild flowers, the souls of ordinary toilers, wearied with the day's

labor, she sends profound, restful sleep.

And she visits also the faraway corners of the garden, wildly overgrown with thorny, monstrous cactuses, greenish ferns, intoxicating hops, and the creeping, graveyard ivy, and to them all, despairing of joy on earth, disappointed in life, sorrowful, and grieving, gloomily hastening to meet death, she grants moments of complete forgetfulness, without dreams, without memories.

And in the morning, when amidst the gold and crimson dawn, the triumphant sun, ever burning with the fire of victory, begins to rise, the Holy Virgin lifts her clear eyes toward heaven and says:

“Be thou blessed, O Creator, who exhibits to us the sign of his greatness. Be blessed all his creation, too. Be blessed the sacred eternal maternity of the world. For ever and ever.”

And the flowers send their reply in scarcely audible whisper:

“Amen.”

And like holy incense their aromatic breath rises upward. And the bright face of the sun trembles, reflected in many-colored rays from each dewdrop.

On this night, too, the Holy Virgin walks through her garden. But sad is her beauteous face, lowered are the lashes of her bright eyes, powerless hang her arms along the folds of her blue chiton. Terrible visions float before her: red fields and pastures, still reeking with blood; burnt homes and churches; violated women, tortured children; mounds and mountains of corpses under which moan the dying; groans, curses,

blasphemy that breaks through the death-rattle and the cries; mutilated bodies, withered breasts, fields of battle black with ravens. ...

Oppressive silence, as before a thunderstorm, overhangs the world. The air is perfectly motionless. But the flowers tremble and sway in fright as in a tempest, bending to the very ground and extending their heads to the Virgin with boundless entreaty.

Closed are her lips, and sad is her face. Again and again before her rises the image of him whom human malice, envy, intolerance, cupidity, and ambition sentenced to unbearable tortures and a shameful death. She sees him—beaten, bleeding, carrying upon his shoulders his heavy cross, and stumbling under its weight. Upon the dusty road she sees dark sprays, the drops of his divine blood. She sees his beautiful body, mutilated by torture, hanging by out-turned arms upon the cross, with protruding chest, and bloody sweat upon his deathly pale face. And again she hears his dreadful whisper: “I am thirsty!” And again, as then, a sword is plunged into the mother’s heart.

The sun rises, hidden beyond dark, heavy clouds. It burns in heaven like an enormous red blot, the bloody conflagration of the world. And lifting up her saddened eyes, the Holy Virgin asks timidly, her voice trembling:

“O Lord! Where are the bounds of Thy great wrath?”

But relentless is the wrath of God, and none knows its bounds! And when, in grief and sorrow, the Holy Virgin lowers her eyes

again, she sees that the innocent cups of gentle flowers are  
filled with bloody dew.